

Epsom's leader welcomes more power for Surrey County Council

23 November 2023



Following the Chancellor's announcement in the Autumn Statement regarding the extension of devolution and further County Deals, **Surrey County Council** is engaging in discussions with Government on a Level 2 County Deal.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of Surrey Leaders' and Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "This is a great opportunity for Surrey, which I warmly welcome. The devolution of important functions to the county will, over time, support all our local Councils in their work of delivering for our residents".

The proposed County Deal will see the devolution of the following functions to Surrey:

Strategic role in delivering services:

- Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level,
- Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets,

Supporting local businesses

- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions including hosting strategic business voice,

Local control of sustainable transport

- Ability to introduce bus franchising,

Investment spending

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund planning and delivery at a strategic level (*w.e.f. April 2025: District and Borough Councils will individually have control until then*)

Giving adults the skills for the labour market

- Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education budget
- Providing input into Local Skills Improvement plans

Local control of infrastructure decisions

- Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)

The invitation does not involve or require any structural reform of local government or unitarisation of any form, and crucially does not require there to be a Directly Elected Mayor (DEM). The 12 Councils (11 District and Borough Councils and the County Council) retain their sovereignty, which aligns with the partnership work already taking place across the county.

Surrey is well-placed to seize this opportunity and work together to realise the full benefits of a Level 2 devolution deal for our residents, economy, and environment.

In response to the invitation, work will continue with a range of key stakeholders, including the District and Borough Councils, businesses, LEPS, Further Education colleges and Universities, bus companies, health agencies and other key stakeholders to build a consensus around a positive response to the opportunity to secure a devolution deal for Surrey. As part of this, opportunities for potential onward devolution of functions from county council to district/borough councils will also be explored with the District and Borough Councils.

The counties that have been invited include single council areas, that do not have adjacent, neighbouring unitary authorities or ‘island’ unitary authorities within their boundaries. As such they are not in a position to form Mayoral or County Combined Authorities, which are alternative structures for securing County Deals.

The Levelling Up White Paper published in February 2022, set out three levels of devolution (see Annex A below). A ‘Level 2’ County Deal does not require there to be a Directly Elected Person, and excludes certain powers reserved to Mayoral and Combined Authority areas.

Government officials have expressed an interest in learning about any additional functions local areas would wish to see devolved over the longer term, the Government have made it clear that in the interests of making progress, the Level 2 County Deals being offered will only include the powers outlined above.

Councillor Tim Oliver, Leader, Surrey County Council, said: “I have always been clear in my determination that the residents of Surrey will not be left behind, and this devolution deal with government is a step in the right direction in helping us achieve that ambition.

“Local government and our local communities are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. I’m pleased that the government is recognising that, with hopefully further devolved powers to local government in due course.

“More control over things like local growth, skills and careers for our young people, lifelong learning provision, the climate agenda, local public transport, and housing, will enable the county council, and partners, to make positive change in Surrey.

“We look forward to working with the government, and with local partners like district and borough councils, businesses, and education providers, to maximise the opportunities this county deal presents for the benefit of all residents.

“This is a positive step in delivering more power to communities.”